**Testimonial from Emily McCutcheon**

**Good evening Mark,**

**I would like to ask you a favour, as a Rebound Exchange student, to pass on my utmost thanks and appreciation to the St. Marys Rotary Club.**

**From August 1999 to August 2000 I had the honour of representing the St. Marys Rotary Club on exchange in Belgium.  The experience changed my life forever.  I made friends from all over the world, I gained a family, and it fundamentally changed the way I look at the world, and the definition of family.**

**My second host family became family to me.  Life had its struggles while I was living their with them as the family dealt with alcoholism, mental health issues and cancer.  Despite that we had a ton of laughs, found joy in the small things in life, and ate a lot of chocolate :)**

**My host mom and sister have since visited me in Canada a couple of times, and I have returned a few times as well.  Their family grew with the addition of more grandchildren, only one grandson when I lived there, he was only a few months old, and I remember the laughter and fun we had together.  My visits to them were less frequent as time went on.  I was there visiting again when my host brother had their fourth child, I got to hold my two day old nephew 10 years ago, and I was so blessed to be a part of their ever growing family.**

**I recently returned to Belgium to visit and reconnect with my second host family and introduce them to my youngest son and my spouse.  It had been 10 years since I had last visited them.  Our lives had all change; more children, weddings, divorces, new partners, and new homes.  As soon as the trip was booked I couldn't wait to get there, to see them all and introduce them to part of my family, my heart raced every time I thought about it.  As soon as the train started to reach Belgium I started to feel nostalgic, the home I knew had not changed.  I was disoriented as we got off the train as they had built a brand new train station, and it looked nothing like the one I had known.  As we tried to ensure we had all of our belongings with us from the train, I began to search the platform for my host mom.  It seemed like forever, and then I saw her.  My host mom, running towards me from the other end of the platform, calling my name and tears streaming down her face.  I raced towards her, in tears as well, and we fell into each others arms.  We hugged so long I'm sure everyone else thought they were forgotten about.  But I was home.  In the short time we were there my son developed strong relationships with my host family's young ones, he was very sad to end our trip and not have them around any more.  I felt like it was just yesterday I had been living there, my picture is in my host moms house along with all of her children and grandchildren.**

**I want to truly thank the Rotary Club for their continued support of the Exchange program.  The duration of the exchange itself may only last a year, but the benefits, and relationships that come out of that last a lifetime.  It makes the world a small place, it makes strangers into family, it creates a second home for people, a second family, bonds that last forever.  I cannot thank you enough for the experience you gave me so many years ago.  It changed my life.**

**Yours truly,**

**Emily McCutcheon**

"Always do what you are afraid to do." - Ralph Waldo Emerson